

Elementary & Secondary Education
 Appropriations Committee
 Written Testimony

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My name is Robin Comey and I am the current Collaborative Coordinator of the Branford Early Childhood Collaborative (BECC), a local early childhood council (LECC) partially funded with the investment of \$16,000 from the Office of Early Childhood under the line item of Community Plans for Early Childhood. I would like to say, first and foremost, these small investment dollars go a long way as they are folded into other dollars to maximize our organization!

BECC has been in existence since 2001, supporting Branford families and children with a wide array of supports and programs that benefit the Town of Branford and improve outcomes for children. Due to this support by the OEC, private foundations, partners, and the public -- BECC and other LECC's are able to work integrally and are wrapped tightly as a part of our community fabric. The OEC's small investments are so critical to continuing our work going forward.

The LECC's are currently the people in our community that are the most knowledgeable about our local, state and national landscape in the field of early childhood. I say that proudly, and with no exaggeration. Often we are the singular organization in our local communities executing the OEC's 2020 Strategic Plan. As well, in Branford, we are the only organization that has the "legs" to carry out the mandates of the School Readiness Grant Funding. There are no other organizations that have funding to carry out the broad community wide requirements of the School Readiness Grant. Over the past 15 years we have been focused on school readiness transition, provider training and family engagement.

Further, I believe, in order for the OEC's 2020 Strategic Plan to be successful at the local level, continued investments in the Community Plans is critical.

We support the plan in the following ways;

Obj. 1.1 – Communication & Connection with Families

We carry this work out through our publication of our Children's Resource Guide, community family events, and Parent Education Workshops. Our focus continues to support hard-to-reach families such as those in poverty and English Language Learners by publishing resources in Spanish.

2.1 Invest and Secure funding to Increase program quality. Over 15 years BECC has secured approximately \$500,000 to support early childhood initiatives in Branford. That does not include our advocacy of securing School Readiness Funds (\$600,000 over 5 years) which is now an important funding stream for low-income children. We had one year of investment from our municipality (2012) and several local, and regional community foundations. We have minimal town government funded social services that support children under the age of 8, other than the East Shore Regional Health Department's federally funded Nurturing Families program. We continue to recognize the importance of supporting young children and families and advocate for additional investments to our community.

2.2 Providing access to family support services – We have evidence based programming such as Circle of Security, Parents as Teachers and we are beginning an exciting program in 2017 to provide eligibility to any woman who has a new baby in Branford, a free home outreach visit from a qualified home visitor. This home visiting pilot program will act as a touchpoint, provide resources about health and development and refer out to existing support agencies when necessary.

2.3 Support Program Improvement of early care teachers to comply with licensing and regulations – As we know the regulations and qualifications of teachers are increasing. Our FREE local monthly workshops provide all home care providers, day care workers and preschool teachers professional training and development. They are attended by 30-40 professionals a month. This Early Care Provider Roundtable is a cornerstone of our programming and well-respected. Topics center around the CTCLDS, children's health development, speech development, behavior management, parent communication and developmentally appropriate practice. We also bring in special speakers from organizations such as Birth to Three, Early Childhood Consultation Partnership and Read to Grow. None of this would take place without the existence of our organization.

Objective 4.1 – Strengthen relationships with community partners and stakeholders.

We are a key partner with many organizations in town. We have worked with Branford Social Services and the Police Department, East Shore District Health Department, the libraries, the Branford School System, Town Hall and multiple not-for-profits supporting children and families in Branford. We recently published a report titled, Community Report: Status of Branford Children, a compilation of public data and is an excellent resource for our community stakeholders and local govt. officials for decision-making. We published the report with the assistance of the Superintendent of Schools, the First Selectman of Branford, East Shore District Health Department, Connecticut Department of Children & Families and WIC. Our organization is an important piece to inform stakeholders on the issues facing children and families.

In conclusion, as you can see, the small investment of the OEC's Community Plan money to communities such as Branford, is critical to keeping our communities on-track and engaged in the lives of children and families. BECC provides critical supports to children, families and teachers in our community. As important, we provide an important structure to funnel down and braid the current State and National Early Childhood priorities our town. Without this funding much (if not all) of this work will cease to exist and our LECC's may survive 6 months, a year or two. We need continued investment. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Robin Comey